

What is claimed is:

1. A beverage comprising:
 - a) water; and
 - b) a monoprotic antimicrobial agent having a pK_a of less than about 2.6, or a polyprotic antimicrobial agent having a pK_{a1} of less than about 2.6 and a pK_{a2} of less than about 3 or greater than about 6, or both wherein the beverage is substantially free of citric acid.
2. The beverage according to claim 1 wherein the antimicrobial agent is monoprotic, the monoprotic antimicrobial agent being sodium bisulfate, potassium bisulfate, ammonium bisulfate, hydrochloric acid or a mixture thereof.
3. The beverage according to claim 1 wherein the antimicrobial agent is polyprotic, the polyprotic antimicrobial agent being phosphoric acid or a hydrochloride of glycine, alanine, valine, leucine, isoleucine, phenylalanine, asparagine, glutamine, tryptophan, serine, tyrosine, hydroxyproline, cysteine, proline or mixtures thereof.
4. The beverage according to claim 1 wherein the antimicrobial agent has a pK_a from about -7.5 to about 2.5.
5. The beverage according to claim 1 wherein the beverage comprises less than about 0.0030% by weight citric acid.
6. The beverage according to claim 1 wherein the beverage comprises a dairy source, fruit flavor, vegetable, cocoa, coffee, tea or a mixture thereof.
7. The beverage according to claim 1 wherein the beverage is tea-containing and comprises at least about 0.01% to about 0.40% by weight tea solids.

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8. The beverage according to claim 1 wherein the beverage is tea-containing and comprises from about 0.14% to about 0.40% by weight tea solids.
9. The beverage according to claim 1 wherein the beverage is made from a precursor which is a high solid content tea-containing liquid.
10. The beverage according to claim 1 wherein the beverage is not sweetened.
11. The beverage according to claim 1 wherein the beverage is not carbonated.
12. The beverage according to claim 1 wherein the beverage has a pH from about 2.75 to about 5.0.
13. The beverage according to claim 1 wherein the beverage is thermally treated from about 80°C to about 95°C.
14. The beverage according to claim 1 wherein the beverage is packaged in a glass bottle, plastic bottle, can or Tetra Pak package.
15. The beverage according to claim 4 wherein the antimicrobial agent is sodium bisulfate.
16. The beverage according to claim 1 wherein the beverage comprises less than about 0.0030% by weight citric acid.

17. A method for making a microbiologically stable beverage comprising, in no particular order, the steps of:

- a) mixing a beverage precursor with water and acidulant to produce a mixture;
and
- b) thermally treating the mixture at a temperature from about 80°C to about 95°C to produce the microbiologically stable beverage

wherein the acidulant is monoprotic and has a pKa of less than about 2.6, or is polyprotic and has a pKa₁ of less than about 2.6 or a pKa₂ of less than about 3 or greater than about 6.

18. The method according to claim 17 wherein the beverage is a tea-containing beverage.

19. The method according to claim 17 wherein the beverage comprises a monoprotic antimicrobial agent, the monoprotic antimicrobial agent being sodium bisulfate.

20. The method according to claim 17 wherein the beverage comprises less than about 0.0030% by weight citric acid.